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17 March 1948

UNITED NATIONS PALESTINE COMMISSION

Communication Received from Hebrew
Committee of National Liberation.

The following communication, concerning the formation of a Provisional Council of Government in the Jewish State, has been addressed to Mr. Lisicky by the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation.

17 March 1948

2315 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington 8, D.C.

HEBREW COMMITTEE OF NATIONAL LIBERATION

March 16, 1948

Dear Dr. Lisicky:

In our letter of February 16, 1948, and during the March 1st session of the United Nations Commission on Palestine, we presented our basic views regarding the emergency situation in Palestine. Now that the Commission is beginning deliberations on the specific question of the formation of a Provisional Council of Government for Hebrew Palestine, we respectfully submit the views of the Hebrew Committee of National Liberation on this question. While the Hebrew Committee, as a Palestinian body in exile, is naturally deeply concerned with the urgent need for such a Provisional Government, we wish to point out that, in accordance with our policy as previously outlined to the Commission, neither the Hebrew Committee nor its individual members are seeking participation in the Council of Government itself.

We welcome the fact that the Commission's Second Monthly Report indicates the Commission is determined to proceed with the establishment of the Provisional Council of Government of the Hebrew Republic of Palestine. We believe that this Provisional Council must be formed even though the Commission will not be in Palestine by April 1st and even though the Government of the United Kingdom opposes such a step. It will, of course, be impossible for the Provisional Council of Government to begin exercising its authority in Palestine before May 15th, but, in any event, it can come into existence on March 31st, and, under the guidance of your Commission, its representatives abroad can begin functioning officially with respect to many urgent practical matters, such as military and food supplies, financial arrangements, etc.

As to the composition of the Provisional Council of Government, the Hebrew Committee wishes to take strong exception to the known views of the Jewish Agency in this matter. The Hebrew people, as a modern and democratic nation, are eager to safeguard the civil, religious and political rights of all the inhabitants of Palestine. It must be clear, therefore, that the Provisional Council is to be a Palestinian, not a Jewish body. Until such time as democratic elections can be held in which Palestinians of all creeds, as well as the repatriated Hebrews of the diaspora can participate, a number of places on the Council should be allocated to representative Christians and Moslems. Every effort should be made to obtain their participation in the Council of Government. If, however, because of the intimidation and terror of the fascist "Arab Higher Committee," the participation of Christians and Moslems cannot be obtained at the present time, it should be made clear that seats are reserved for them in the Council and that efforts to secure their participation will be made by the Council itself after it has been created.

We respectfully propose, therefore, that the Provisional Council of Government of Hebrew Palestine be composed of the minimal number of members needed to give proper representation to all elements of the population and to provide heads for all the essential Ministries. This number, in our estimation, should be seventeen. Four or five of these members should be Palestinians of Christian and Moslem faith. In the event that it should prove impossible at the present time to find suitable candidates for these posts, they should be left unfilled, and the functions of the Ministries they would otherwise direct should meanwhile be carried on by Under-secretaries. The composition suggested above is offered as a measure of good will which would help stabilize conditions in Palestine.

Dr. Karel Lisicky, Chairman
United Nations Palestine Commission.

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It is the view of the Hebrew Committee that the Provisional Council of Government should reflect the configuration of "democratic and other public groups" in Palestine. We reject the composition advocated by the Jewish Agency which is based upon the structure and representation of Zionist parties in the World Zionist Organization, and, consequently, is not representative of the Hebrew nation. We propose, therefore, that the Provisional Council of Government should be selected by the United Nations Commission from among: Underground forces which, because of British occupation, could not function openly as political parties; Palestinian parties, in accordance with their numerical strength in Palestine; the mayors of the principal cities, and the Sephardic and Yemenite communities.

Furthermore the General Assembly, having recognized Hebrew sovereignty in Palestine, has made special provisions to safeguard the rights, in the transition period, of those Hebrews who have as yet been prevented from reaching Palestine. We believe, consequently, that the Provisional Council of Government should include several representative Hebrews from among Hebrew nationals awaiting repatriation to Palestine, particularly those concentrated in Cyprus and Hebrew displaced persons camps in Europe.

We also reject the structure proposed by the Jewish Agency for the Provisional Council of Government, which seems to us to resemble more closely a religious Vatican than a modern republic. There has been announced, for example, the proposed creation of a "Ministry of Education and Religion" to be headed by a Rabbi. We see no necessity whatever for a Ministry of Religion, unless its task be to assure the equality of all religions before the law, and we certainly cannot accept that the Ministry of Education be in any way connected with religion. In other words, we believe that the structure of the Council must be based on the democratic principle of separation of State and Church.

The great historical significance of the recognition of Hebrew sovereignty in Palestine lies in the opportunity it offers to cure, in the interest of all nations, one of the world's greatest ills -- the "world Jewish problem." This cannot be achieved by creation of a Jewish Vatican, which would perpetuate rather than solve the problem.

The Hebrew Republic of Palestine must come into being as a normal, modern, democratic state. It must break away from the abnormal way of existence that has been forced upon our people by centuries of oppression and persecution. We trust that the United Nations Commission will help the Hebrew people to establish a genuine sovereignty in Palestine, and not a segregated, ghetto-like entity.

We beg to submit that the very term "Jewish State" is both confusing and ambiguous, and we suggest that it be replaced by that of the "Hebrew Republic of Palestine." This would clarify the status of the millions of Jews who are citizens of other countries and intend to remain so.

We hope that the Commission will give due consideration to the views herein expressed and we respectfully request an opportunity to appear before your Commission in order to give a fuller and more detailed exposition of our proposals regarding the question of the Provisional Council of Government and to answer whatever questions the Commission may wish to put to us.

With the assurances of my high esteem and consideration.

Faithfully yours,

(signed) PETER H. BERGSON
Peter H. Bergson